

LOOK UP! The HOPEFUL REALIST Newsletter:

Looking at the World Today as if Facts Matter

Robert MacNeil Christie, PhD

Here we explore the latest facts, actions, and perspectives on the New Great Transformation of the Earth System, as it unfolds before our eyes. We apply the Hopeful Realism we all need to work through the greatest predicament in human history.

Latest News from the Hopeful Realist

Fourth of July, or, the Twentieth of August: 250 Years of “Independence” or 407 Years of Subjugation?

The Fourth-of-July holiday is over, but what was it really about? Independence is a tricky word. The rebellious American colonists, weary of excessive economic dependence and political subordination were able to break away from domination by the king of England, and the extortionist trade rules he imposed. They were bursting with energy to expand their own successes, when they broke with the king officially on July 4, 1776. Even so, some were quite hesitant to demand independence and a few remained loyal to the crown.

The *Fourth of July* is certainly a significant holiday for most Americans. But it is important to remember—or rediscover—that every national history is far more complex than is written in the history textbooks, and far more difficult than claimed by Fox News pseudo-historian jingoists.

If we look at the American colonies as evolving societies in complex relations to their new surroundings, including the native peoples who had occupied the lands the colonists were ‘settling,’ and also in the context of their early relations with slaves imported from Africa, then the nation’s beginnings become far more meaningful than “the bombs bursting in air” as represented by Fourth of July fireworks. Seen honestly, the origins of the nation were tainted by expropriation, exploitation, and expulsion, from the very start. The desire to celebrate the beginnings of what some people now imagine a ‘white nation’ suppresses the facts of tyranny at its core. It also shows a deep denial of history.

The first of many slave ships to deposit kidnaped victims on American shores, arrived near Jamestown at *Point Comfort* (irony?)—now Fort Monroe, Hampton, Virginia—on August 30, 1619, four-hundred and seven years before 2026. That is 157 years before the American colonies gained independence from England in 1776.

A lot happened in that century and a half. And, some of it tainted the self-proclaimed glory of a nation whose Declaration of Independence would declare “all men are created equal” The trans-

Atlantic [slave trade](#) “began in the early 1500s and continued into the mid-1800s.” For the American colonies, it began over a year before the landing of the Mayflower on November 21, 1620. Slavery was integral to the earliest development of American society; its legacy lives on today.

Now, such facts of history have not stopped most Americans from pounding down those hotdogs, guzzling six-packs, or endangering their neighbors with ‘legal’ fireworks. But the integral part slavery, along with massacres of native peoples, and invasions of other countries to follow played in our history, should give any good citizen pause when touting the American imaginary achievement of “bringing democracy” to the world. In fact, since the beginning of its official existence, the United States of America has been at war for about 229 of its 250 years—that’s about 92%. We would do well to consider the role of violence in “making America Great,” if not again.

Independence is an overly simplistic concept. What kind of independence does the lockstep collective behavior of celebrating itself with a massive display of fireworks that represent the beauty of “bombs bursting in air,” by a nation whose culture is steeped in war? It is not so much that the people oohing and aahing over the air-polluting displays (which triggered health warnings of unhealthful air over Washington, DC a few days ago) are thinking of war. Most genuinely appreciate the diverse splashes of color in the night sky at an aesthetic level. But its origins and implications are clearly martial.

The meaning of the word *interdependence* is more complex, and more meaningful when applied to the ways societies actually work. Any viable society—which must allow a significant level of wellbeing for all its members—involves a great deal of interdependence among its members and among its institutions as well. Any real freedom in this world is grounded in responsibility and cooperation.

Now, interdependence may turn out to be cumbersome and bureaucratic in some cases, or it may imply trust and sharing among the people in others. Yet, in the present context, when the self-proclaimed ‘supreme leader’ takes the opportunity of any and every national celebration as a celebration of himself, well, what we have here is a failure of society to correct aberrant and corrupt patterns among its highest leadership and the surrounding circle of white nationalist sycophants and hangers-on. What did that speech on the Fourth really say to you?

Only by facing the facts of our history and comparing them and the present to our ideals for a free and open society, can we move away from the current autocratic attempt and into the security of a real democracy capable of rising to the even deeper challenges of immediate threats of societal and environmental collapse.

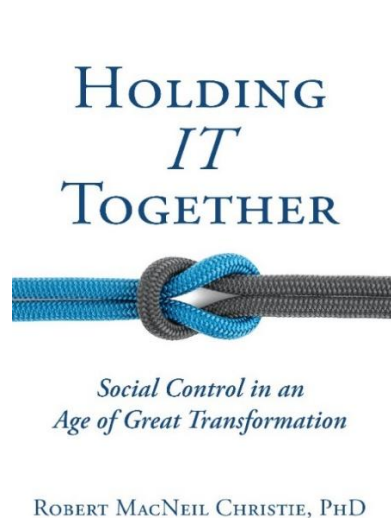
Some estimates of the impact of the ‘super El Nino’ emerging over the next few months portend dire damage around the world, caused by record storms, draughts, floods, and wildfires. The economic disruption from the supply chain interruptions via the near complete closure of the Strait of Hormuz, even if it were to be fully open tomorrow, involves a lagged two-plus month lag in international transportation of energy and related products. Even with the increased U.S. oil production to record levels—much of it sold overseas—the anticipated shortages will be

severe—especially in context of the fact that most nations’ reserves have already been depleted. Dependency can be painful when the flow is disrupted.

We can expect the rest of this year to be increasingly chaotic, and any recovery will happen much slower. The dependency in complex systems run on high energy-density fuels can become catastrophic when disruptions in the flow of energy occur. That does not change by the industrial-consumer culture’s naïve assumptions of the invulnerability of modern technologies.

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Here is a shorter promo for ***Holding IT Together*** which, in every issue of this newsletters may seem redundant, but, hey, it costs me nothing.



Can Modern Civilization Transform Itself in Order to Survive?

In *Holding IT Together*, Dr. Robert MacNeil Christie explains how we got into this mess and what it will take to come out alive. Despite its many benefits, industrial civilization has become an existential threat to itself and our Earth System. It may even threaten our survival, along with many other species. We must transform ourselves, our communities, and our societies into responsible members of the ecosystems of which we are a part. We must ‘hold it together’ to find a place of our own within the living Earth system, Gaia.

Libraries seeking treatises on the major dilemmas of modern society and living, who look for well-researched blends of and contrasts between different viewpoints...will find Holding IT Together especially relevant... ~ **Midwest Book Review**

Christie’s writing is sharp and thought-provoking, making complex ideas accessible...this book calls for decisive action toward a sustainable, equitable future, making it an essential resource for policymakers, activists, and concerned citizens alike. ~ **The Prairies Book Review**

“Buy it!” says the author.

My eBook **HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto** is available on Amazon.com. Please give it a rating/review on [GoodReads.com](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4185406.Hopeful-Realism). Or, [review and rate](#) *Hopeful Realism* on its Amazon page.

Note: As always, past issues of this Newsletter are available, archived on my web site:

<https://thehopefulrealist.com/hopeful-realist-newsletter/>

LOOK UP! A Bi-weekly Featured Commentary

Freedom, Income, and Wealth: They are, after all, Related.

If freedom is actually an American value, then we need to take a closer look at what it is all about. Otherwise, it is just another word meant to elicit emotional adherence to unexamined claims to a ‘wonderful world,’ and obedience to what is increasingly becoming a despotic regime. That means shaking off the illusions perpetrated by those who would prevent us from having freedom by crowding our minds with emotional imaginaries and historical falsehoods.

Even more important, those same forces would take freedom away by promoting and sustaining memes portraying imaginary conditions in a bygone era of a Great America, and that we need to follow them to regain a world that never was, while at the same time claiming we are all free as Americans.

But we are also encouraged to see freedom as “us” against “the government,” as Timothy Snyder points out in his important book [*On Freedom*](#). That is exactly what the new fascists want us to do. They take over governments by denigrating government in order to control and monetize government functions, plundering and destroying them in the process. Their goal is to politically control everyone by controlling and diminishing the services and functions of democratic government in order to establish an autocratic regime and rule without opposition.

So, “What’s it all about, Alfie?.” What did she mean when Janice Joplin sang, “Freedom is just another word for nothing more to lose”? If we feel threatened by the possibility of losing what is important to us, are we really free? Probably not.

Just how free is the ultra-billionaire, Jeff Bezos? He has more to lose than almost anyone, except Elon Musk—which makes Musk look pretty unfree, trapped by his obsession with dominating all that he can. We might consider that Bezos is driven to protect and grow his ultra-wealth and is compelled to squeeze more work for less pay from his many workers. If you are not free to share, you have lost a key element of your freedom.

Bezos’s ex-wife, who began her freedom from him with a net worth of billions, now spends her time frequently giving away millions of dollars at a time, no obligations attached, to struggling non-profit groups that are serving the most vulnerable people in the nation. Her net worth nevertheless keeps growing because of the interest and appreciation of her stock holdings. She is free to continue giving away all she wants without any restrictions, as long as she wants; nor do her beneficiaries have any restrictions on how they use the money she gives them. Her gifts are based on the trust she has that they will continue to do the good work they have struggled to do for years or decades. Freedom has to be based on trust. As Timothy Snyder puts it, freedom is about what you are *for*, not what you are *against*.

Steve Schmidt, former Republican strategist and deeply committed patriot in the sense of being a staunch defender of the Constitution, recently said, in his Substack platform, [*The Warning*](#):

We’ve replaced civic education with credentialism. History with trivia. Citizenship with consumption. Patriotism with branding.

The founders understood something that modern America has forgotten: a republic can’t survive if its citizens don’t understand what it is.

Freedom isn't self-executing.

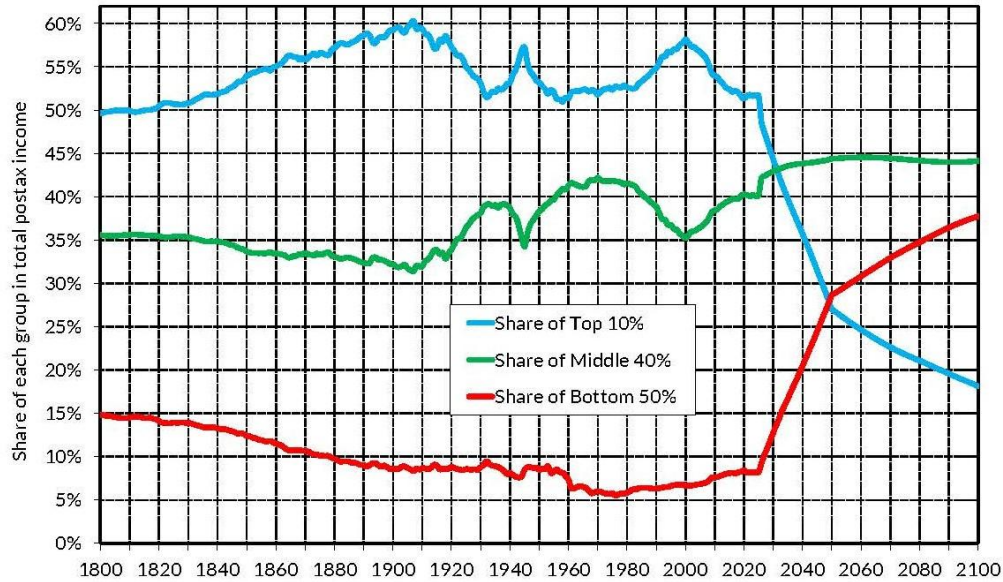
There is a lot to unpack in what Steve says, as usual. In his outrage with the MAGA autocratic attempt, he is routinely eloquent. When the Republican Party turned MAGA, Steve walked away and joined others to form the oppositional group, the [Save America Movement](#). Steve is free because he is exercising the freedom he wants to protect for all of us.

Today's Featured Image:

Transitioning to the world as it should be is represented in today's featured images. The two graphs below show hypothetical changes in global inequality of income and wealth, showing how the global distribution of income and wealth could dramatically change, if the 'platform' advocated by the Global Justice Project, were to be realized—"an alternative to climate breakdown, political extremism and economic tensions," as Jonathan Watts put it in [The Guardian](#), where he described the report.

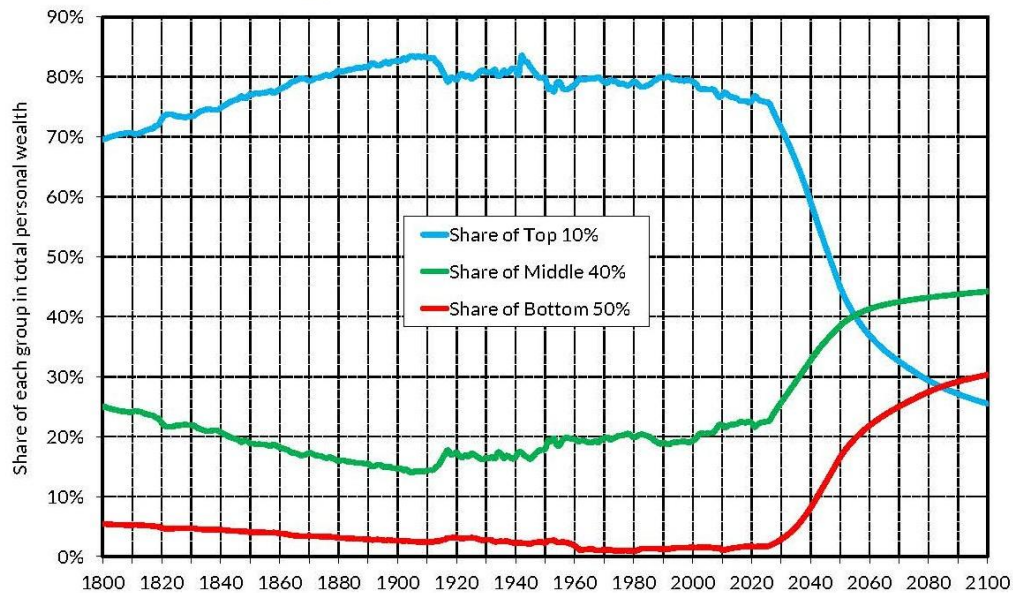
Figure 2.14. Combining Between-Country & Within-Country Inequality Compression

(a) Global Income Shares 2026-2100



Interpretation. According to the Global Justice Platform, the share of the top 10% highest incomes in total posttax income in the world is projected to decline from 52% in 2025 to 18% in 2100. The share of the global bottom 50% in posttax income is projected to increase from 8% in 2025 to 38% in 2100, and for the middle 40% from 40% today to 44% in 2100. These changes are a combined effect of between-country income convergence and within-country income compression (in line with long-run trends in Nordic Europe). **Sources and series:** gjp.wid.world (F2.14a)

(b) Global Wealth Shares 2026-2100



Interpretation. According to the Global Justice Platform, the share of the top 10% highest wealth holders in total household wealth in the world is projected to decline from 76% in 2025 to 25% in 2100. The share of the global bottom 50% household wealth is projected to increase from 2% in 2025 to 30% in 2100, and for the middle 40% from 23% in 2025 to 44% in 2100. These changes are a combined effect of between-country wealth convergence and within-country wealth compression. **Sources and series:** gjp.wid.world (F2.14b)

The implications of the report are monumental, as are the obstacles to realizing the potentials it outlines for a future of relative equity and prosperity in a world that is rapidly deteriorating, both in the physical/biological and societal dimensions. Friendly critics, like [Timothée Parrique](#), raise important questions as well. Yet, neither faces the even larger questions of what methods of change can be applied to reach its objectives.

Books and other Sources Related to the New Great Transformation

Any talk of freedom in the modern world of American society must consider not only the legacy of slavery and its most recent consequences, but also must think about the nature of caste itself—the categorization of persons and their isolation and exclusion on the basis of the category to which they have been assigned—the essence of caste is oppression. The tyranny of caste excludes people from the freedom everyone deserves. That is why I have chosen these two books to feature in this edition of *The Hopeful Realism Newsletter*.

Nichole Hannah-Jones, et al. 2024. *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*. New York: Random House (One World paperback edition).

Isabel Wilkerson. 2020. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. New York: Random House.

Pulitzer Prize winner, Nichole Hannah-Jones' compilation of essays was hailed for its new framing of American History grounded in the history of African Americans, and was also derided for contradicting the self-congratulatory framing of American history that denies the violence and oppression that were integral to the nation's growth. But facts are facts, and interpretations may or may not follow the facts.

Isabel Wilkerson, also a Pulitzer Prize winner, sheds additional light on the essential role caste has played in American history. The importance of Wilkerson's work is highlighted by the fact that Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson cited it in her [concurring opinion](#) in the Court's ruling affirming birthright citizenship. To ignore these three Black women—two brilliant writers and one Supreme Court Justice—is to deny the truth, which is always a matter of facing uncomfortable facts.

Quotable Quotes

Toni Morrison may be the literary voice of hopeful realism. Her writing evokes the necessity of being real in the most dire and unreasonable circumstances. She does not shy away from the harsh facts and she demands that we face what is in the full light of what must be the object of our struggles.

Don't let anybody, anybody convince you this is the way the world is and therefore must be. It must be the way it ought to be.

— Toni Morrison, *The Source of Self-Regard*

Morrison expresses the essence of what Isabel Wilkerson and Nichole Hannah-Jones expose in each of their nonfiction works on the racist and caste elements in the development of the United States of America, which involved defending hierarchy and oppression for many, just as much as defending freedom for the few. As Immanuel Kant put it, “Dare to know!”

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See you in two weeks. Meanwhile, stay safe, say hello to a neighbor or stranger, check out my blog posts at [The Hopeful Realist.com](https://TheHopefulRealist.com), read [HOPEFUL REALISM: A Climate Manifesto.](#), and, buy my recent book, [*Holding It Together: Social Control in an Age of Great Transformation*](#).